

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD OF
CARL BLAKE,
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR,
PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
CONCERNING
H.R 419, THE "HIRE VETERANS ACT OF 2004,"
THE "HOMELESS VETERANS REINTEGRATION PROGRAM
REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2005,"
THE "SERVICEMEMBERS' HEALTH INSURANCE PROTECTION
ACT OF 2005," AND
THE "SERVICEMEMBERS TAXATION PROTECTION ACT OF 2005"

MAY 4, 2005

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

H.R. 419, the “Hire Veterans Act of 2004”

- The President’s National Hire Veterans Committee was established by P.L. 107-288, the “Jobs for Veterans Act.”
- The President’s Committee has not lived up to expectations.
 - There is no tangible proof of accomplishments.
 - PVA is unable to ascertain if there is a Committee report to Congress for 2003.
- PVA opposes proposal to fund the reauthorization of the President’s Committee out of funds for DVOP specialists and LVERs.
 - We believe it is part of an effort to reduce these critical staff.

The “Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program Reauthorization Act of 2005”

- PVA supports the provisions of this proposed legislation.
- HVRP provides help for those veterans with the most significant problems from substance abuse, severe PTSD, serious social problems, legal issues, and HIV.
- PVA recommends reauthorization through FY 2011.
- The Administration requested only \$22 million for HVRP for FY 2006, but the authorization provides for \$50 million. Adequate funding must be provided.

The “Servicemembers Health Insurance Protection Act of 2005”

- PVA supports this proposed legislation.
- Once Guardsmen and Reservists are called to active duty, they fall under the care of the Department of Defense health care system, and they generally are dropped from their health coverage plans with their private employers.
- When these men and women return to their civilian employment, many of them are being forced to pay higher premiums than their fellow private sector employees for their health insurance.
- This legislation would correct this inequity.

The “Servicemembers Taxation Protection Act of 2005”

- PVA fully supports this proposed legislation.
- PVA believes that this inequity is a basic issue of fairness.
- Servicemembers who move often during the course of their careers from one duty station to the next face different state tax laws that they are unfamiliar with.
- When the servicemember relocates to a new state on change of station orders, the servicemember is often penalized by paying similar property taxes in the new state that they paid in their previous state.

Chairman Boozman, Ranking Member Herseth, members of the Subcommittee, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement for the record regarding H.R. 419, the “Hire Veterans Act of 2004, the “Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program Reauthorization Act of 2005,” the “Servicemembers Health Insurance Protection Act of 2005,” and the “Servicemembers Taxation Protection Act of 2005.” As more and more men and women return from the frontlines in Iraq and Afghanistan, we must continually work to improve services and benefits.

H.R. 419, the “Hire Veterans Act of 2004”

The President’s National Hire Veterans Committee was established by P.L. 107-288, the “Jobs for Veterans Act.” In testimony provided before the House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Benefits on April 18, 2002, PVA supported the creation of the President’s Committee. The original purpose of the Committee was to raise employer awareness of the skills of veterans and the benefits of hiring veterans as well as help bridge the gap in communication that often exists between employers and veterans seeking employment.

However, we believe that the President’s Committee has not lived up to expectations. After reviewing the Committee’s report to Congress for 2004, we see no tangible proof that this Committee has helped open doors to veterans seeking employment in the private sector. The report implies that the Committee played a major role in the creation of The Home Depot’s Operation Career Front, an initiative that seeks to attract military job

seekers, but the report lacks detailed information regarding the real extent of the Committee's involvement. Furthermore, we have not seen any other reports provided by the President's Committee. In accordance with the provisions of P.L. 107-288, the Committee was to have provided a report for 2003, 2004, and 2005; yet, we have only seen the report for 2004.

PVA is particularly concerned about the provision of the legislation that would allow the President's Committee to be funded out of money provided to the Department of Labor (DOL) for the administration of Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists and Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVER). The advantage of face-to-face interaction between DVOP and LVER staff members and veterans cannot be overstated. However, PVA believes that current efforts to change the way employment services at DOL are funded jeopardizes DVOP specialists and LVERs. It seems that unless there is a paradigm shift, the number of DVOP specialists and LVER staff will be reduced. This legislation would only further efforts to reduce the services they provide. For this reason, PVA opposes H.R. 419.

The "HVRP Reauthorization Act of 2005"

The VA estimates that approximately 275,000 veterans are homeless on any given night, and that more than 500,000 veterans experience homelessness in a year. PVA believes that the key to overcoming homelessness among the veterans population is employment. A veteran is unable to provide for himself or herself, much less a family, without the benefit of gainful employment. The Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (HVRP) managed

by DOL's Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) is a valuable program focusing on employment of homeless veterans. This program has achieved wonderful success since its inception almost 20 years ago. The HVRP provides help for those veterans with the most significant problems from substance abuse, severe PTSD, serious social problems, legal issues and HIV. The specialized services needed for these veterans are often the only hope.

PVA supports the reauthorization of the HVRP through FY 2008. In fact, we would like to recommend that the program be authorized for five years, through FY 2011. Moreover, PVA, as a member of the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV), also supports the reauthorization of the program at a \$50 million funding level. The HVRP is perhaps the most cost-effective and cost-efficient program in the federal government. In spite of the success of HVRP, it remains severely under-funded. Even more tragically, DOL does not request a full appropriation in its budget submission. For FY 2006, the Administration only requested \$22 million to support this program. However, P.L. 107-95, the "Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act of 2001," authorized \$50 million through FY 2006. Enactment of this legislation would ensure that homeless veterans who need a high level of support get it.

The "Servicemembers Health Insurance Protection Act of 2005"

With mobilization rates for the National Guard and Reserves not seen since World War II, it is essential that updates to existing laws are made to better address the difficulties they are facing. Many protections that exist for active duty servicemembers have not been

properly updated to assist the Guard and Reserve forces. Once Guardsmen and Reservists are called to active duty, they fall under the care of the Department of Defense health care system. They generally are dropped from their health coverage plans with their private employers. Although many employers have taken important steps to ensure that these Guardsmen and Reservists' jobs and benefits are protected, there are equally as many employers who are using their activation to take advantage of them.

When these men and women return to their civilian employment, many of them are being forced to pay higher premiums for their health insurance. Moreover, these premiums are often higher than those that their fellow employees are paying. They are being punished for their time away serving this country. This legislation would correct this inequity. PVA supports this proposed legislation.

The “Servicemembers Taxation Protection Act of 2005”

PVA fully supports this proposed legislation. As servicemembers move during the course of their careers from one duty station to the next, they often face different tax laws based on the state. Often the servicemember and his or her family are not familiar with local tax laws or may think that they do not apply to them when they live on the installation. Too often, servicemen and women are taken advantage of in paying taxes on their personal property. In many cases, the servicemember pays a tax on personal property, such as an excise tax, use tax, or sales tax, at his or her current duty station. When the servicemember relocates to a new state on change of station orders, the new state of residence charges a similar tax to the one already paid on the personal property in the servicemember's

previous state. A servicemember should not be subjected to this penalty simply because he or she is forced to move. PVA believes this is a basic issue of fairness.

PVA appreciates the work of this Subcommittee to address these issues. We look forward to working with you to ensure that proper protections and services are in place to allow the servicemen and women returning from the Iraq and Afghanistan to transition smoothly back into civilian life and employment. Thank you.

Information Required by Rule XI 2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives

Pursuant to Rule XI 2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives, the following information is provided regarding federal grants and contracts.

Fiscal Year 2005

Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, administered by the Legal Services Corporation — National Veterans Legal Services Program — \$228,000 (estimated).

Paralyzed Veterans of America Outdoor Recreation Heritage Fund – Department of Defense -- \$1,000,000.

Fiscal Year 2004

Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, administered by the Legal Services Corporation — National Veterans Legal Services Program — \$228,000 (estimated).

Fiscal Year 2003

Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, administered by the Legal Services Corporation — National Veterans Legal Services Program — \$228,803.

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Carl Blake is an Associate Legislative Director with Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) at PVA's National Office in Washington, D.C. He represents PVA to federal agencies including the Department of Defense, Department of Labor, Small Business Administration, and the Office of Personnel Management. In addition, he represents PVA on issues such as homeless veterans and disabled veterans' employment as well as coordinates issues with other Veterans Service Organizations.

Carl was raised in Woodford, Virginia. He attended the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. He received a Bachelor of Science Degree from the Military Academy in May 1998. He received the National Organization of the Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States Award for Excellence in the Environmental Engineering Sequence.

Upon graduation from the Military Academy, he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army. He was assigned to the 1st Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Carl was retired from the military in October 2000 due to a service-connected disability.

Carl is a member of the Virginia-Mid-Atlantic chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America.

Carl lives in Fredericksburg, Virginia with his wife Venus and son Jonathan.